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AUTHOR Flaherty, Thomas F.; Flaherty, John J.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a historical review of the gradual growth of interest in an establishment of legislation in Massachusetts for institutions concerned exclusively with the training of teachers. Highlighted is the activity of James G. Carter in this endeavor. The state of education at the beginning of the nineteenth century is described: private schools flourished over common schools; and people became teachers because it was easier than manual labor, because they needed employment between more lucrative positions, or because they were not fit for anything else. Carter publicized this situation, advocated a change in the caliber of common school teachers, and called for the establishment of a teacher training institution. Carter's plan for such an institution included a well-stocked library, professors skilled in their respective areas, a laboratory school, a board of commissioners, and a student teaching program. Carter's private efforts to form such an institution failed in the late 1820s, but while he was a member of the House of Representatives, his bill calling for the establishment of a board of education passed in 1837. The paper concludes with mention of Carter's victory: the establishment of normal schools for the education of teachers in 1838. (JA)

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JAMES CARTER: CHAMPION OF THE NORMAL SCHOOL MOVEMENT

by

Thomas F. Flaherty

John J. Flaherty

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Competent, dedicated teachers are the most important components in an effective educational system. Good textbooks and bright, attractive classrooms are important aids to learning, but well-qualified teachers are absolutely necessary. Early in the nineteenth century some of the leading educators in Massachusetts realized that action should be taken to improve the quality of instruction offered in the common schools. Good teachers were urgently needed. This article will be devoted to a study of the efforts made to establish institutions whose sole concern would be the preparation of teachers.

During the early years of the country Massachusetts stood as a leader in the field of education. Many of the first settlers in Massachusetts were graduates of Cambridge and Oxford and were, therefore, very much interested in establishing a good educational program for their children. In 1635 Boston Latin School was established, and a year later Harvard College was founded so that the people of the colony could enjoy the benefits of higher education.[1] The legislature in 1647 passed a very important education act.

Known as the "old deluder law", this legislation provided that every town of fifty or more families must establish a school and staff it with a well-qualified teacher.[2]

But interest in education waned in the eighteenth century so that by the early part of the nineteenth century the common schools of Massachusetts were in a very serious state. People had generally become indifferent on the question of public education, and private schools mushroomed. In an article appearing in one of the educational journals in 1824, it was pointed out that the smaller towns no longer felt any obligation to seek well-qualified teachers. The legislature did not demand that the people provide good free education, and as a consequence the quality of these schools was deteriorating rapidly.[3]

Most of the best teachers and the best students turned to the private schools. Thus it was natural that the wealthiest people in the town decided to send their children to these schools, so that only the poor youngsters found it necessary to attend the common schools.[4] One author writing in the New England Magazine pointed to the dangers of such action. He insisted that "in order to make the whole community move onward in this course of improvement, you must aim to bind the interest of all classes of citizens, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, into one common bundle."[5] Thus the interests of all the people would be best served by providing good free education.

In 1827 the condition of the common schools sank to its lowest point. George Martin in his study of the Massachusetts school system describes the situation very aptly. He maintains that "the year 1827 . . . is a memorable one. It marks the culmination of a process which had been going on steadily for more than a century. It marks the utmost limit to the subdivision of American sovereignty - the high water mark of modern democracy, and the low-water mark of the Massachusetts school system."[6]

James G. Carter realized that the common schools were in serious difficulty and attempted to arouse public interest in the plight of these schools. Carter, a graduate of Harvard and a teacher for many years himself, acquired a large audience for his views through the publication of writings called Letters to the Honorable William Prescott, L.L.D., on the Free Schools of New England. Hinsdale feels that these letters give "the best existing mirror of education in New England in the first half of this [the nineteenth] century."[7] In these letters Carter declared that the basic reasons for the deplorable state of the common schools were "1st, Incompetent instructors; 2d, Bad school books." He expanded on his views regarding the inadequacy of the teachers remarking that "the whole business of instruction with very few exceptions has hitherto been performed by those who have felt little interest in the subject, beyond the immediate pecuniary compensation stipulated for their services."[8]

Carter divided the men who became teachers into three categories. The first group was composed of those who entered the teaching profession believing that it was easier and a little more profitable than manual labor. The second and largest group consisted of men who entered the profession on a temporary basis. These men were for the most part well-educated but planned to leave their teaching position as soon as a post which offered greater remuneration was available. While Carter considered these men to be the most useful group of instructors, their teaching was adversely affected by the fact that their employment was only temporary. The last and worst type of teachers, according to Carter, were those, who, aware of their failings, felt that they would be unsuccessful in any other profession and thus became teachers.[9] It is evident that Carter was completely dissatisfied with the men whom the teaching profession was attracting. For as he pointed out, "to develop the powers of the human mind, in the most successful manner, requires a discrimination and judgment which it seldom falls to the lot of men of indifferent talents to possess."[10]

In a speech given some years later, Governor George Briggs of Massachusetts told the story of a teacher whom he had met during the early 1800's. Briggs related that when he was a law student, a schoolmaster had come to him for assistance in determining tuition charges. The teacher was unable to add the half cents because he did not know how to

change half cents into mills or whole cents. According to Briggs, this was not unusual. He asserted, "This was no fiction, but a fair specimen of a class of teachers in the County of Berkshire, thirty years ago."[11]

A few months after the publication of the Letters Carter authored a number of essays which were published in the Boston Patriot over the signature of Franklin. These essays were soon gathered into a small pamphlet. According to Carter, these writings, just as the Letters, were designed "to fix public attention on the parts of the system which seemed, most imperiously, to demand reform."[12] He hoped that if the people became aroused, legislative action would follow. He called the people's attention to the fact that they were committing the education of their children "to those who know nothing, absolutely nothing, of the complicated and difficult duties assigned to them."[13]

In order to produce the needed change in the calibre of the common school teachers, Carter suggested the establishment of a teacher training institution. He outlined his plan in an essay entitled "Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers." It was Carter's basic contention that in the choice of a teacher too much emphasis was placed on "how much he knows, not how much he can communicate."[14] Carter was certainly not alone in this view. Governor Lincoln felt that the prospective teacher needed special training, for he maintained that "knowledge in the art of

governing, and a facility in communicating instruction, are attainments in the teacher, of indispensable importance to proficiency by the pupil. These talents are as much to be acquired by education, as are the sciences themselves."[15]

According to Carter's plan the components appropriate to such an institution would consist of a well-stocked library, professors skilled in their respective areas, a laboratory school, and a Board of Commissioners. Of course, the most important part of this new institution would be the principal and assistant professors. They should be carefully chosen for their teaching ability as well as their general knowledge of their particular subject area. Since the establishment of a teacher training institution would be an entirely new venture, Carter proposed that the professors be granted complete freedom to plan new programs. The author believed that if the professors made use of the library and their own experiences, they could give the prospective teachers some valuable insights into their chosen profession.[16]

At this new institution the candidate for the teaching profession would first become familiar with a broad range of subjects. After he gained a good knowledge of all of the subjects which he would be required to teach, the prospective teacher would embark upon what Carter considered to be the most important aspect of his training. In a common school, connected with the institution, the young man or

woman, while still a student, would have an opportunity to teach "under the scrutinizing eyes" of an experienced teacher, who would take note of his mistakes and show him how to improve.[17]

The board of commissioners would provide a channel of communication between the public and the administration. In addition, they could handle many of the business affairs of the institution and thus leave the teachers free to devote all their energy to teaching and innovating.

Carter was firmly convinced that the government should provide financial support for the institution. He maintained that the ignorance of the citizens was the greatest enemy of effective government and good teachers would "diffuse knowledge among the whole mass of the people."[18]

In 1827 Carter presented a memorial to the legislature asking for an appropriation for the establishment of a normal school, but a bill providing for the necessary funds lost in the senate by one vote. However, during the same year the town of Lancaster offered him land and a building, so that he might put his plan into operation. Within a few months after the school opened, Carter met with difficulty and was forced to abandon his efforts. But he did continue private instruction for a number of years.[19]

Although Carter was unsuccessful, he remained firm in his insistence that such an institution was necessary. In 1835 he gained a wider audience for his views when he was

elected to the House of Representatives. He served in the House for three years and became a member of the Senate in 1838-39.[20]

The year 1837 was a year of great interest and activity in the support of the education of common school teachers. A number of memorials were presented to the legislature. One of the most important of these was sent to the legislature by the American Institute of Instruction, an organization of teachers who were very interested in educational reform. In their petition they asked the legislature to take action and set up normal schools, for they noted that "wherever in any town, exertion has been made to improve these schools, it has been met and baffled by the want of good teachers."[21] The authors of the memorial summed up their views regarding many of the teachers of the time by pointing out that these teachers "know not what to teach, nor how to teach, nor in what spirit to teach, nor what is the nature of those they undertake to lead, nor what they are themselves who stand forward to lead them."[22]

A month later James Carter addressed the legislature urging them to recognize their responsibilities. Disgusted with their slowness in providing education for teachers, he stated, "How can the [teachers] have skill, and how can they hope for success, when they have had no preparation for the high and delicate duties of their calling and pro-

fession."[23] He also reminded the legislature that "a good teacher will make a good school, and a bad teacher, whatever other means and appliances may be afforded, will make a bad school."[24]

Some progress was made in March of 1837 when the committee on education of the legislature presented a bill calling for the establishment of a Board of Education. The primary duty of this Board would consist of collecting information on the state of the schools and reporting the results to the legislature.[25] When the House defeated the bill 113 - 61, Carter convinced the members of the House that the bill should be discussed by the entire membership. At this meeting the bill was amended, and it passed the House the following day.[26]

In their First Annual Report the members of the Board made clear their feelings with regard to the establishment of teacher training institutions. They maintained that "while occupations requiring a very humble degree of intellectual effort and attainment demand a long continued training, it cannot be that the arduous and manifold duties of the instructor of youth, should be as well performed without as with a specific preparation for them."[27]

It was in this atmosphere that Edmund Dwight, a wealthy member of the Board, offered to donate the sum of ten thousand dollars for the training of teachers if the legisla-

ture would appropriate an equal amount. In April, 1838, Dwight's proposal received the almost unanimous approval of both Houses, and twenty thousand dollars was turned over to the Board of Education to be used for the education of teachers.[28] With these funds the Board decided to establish three normal schools. The first one opened at Lexington in 1839. Shortly thereafter, another one opened at Barre followed by a third at Bridgewater.

Thus Carter's dream was fulfilled. He had been the first to arouse the attention of the people of Massachusetts to the necessity of an institution which would be concerned exclusively with the education of teachers. Now after years of appealing to the public and the legislature, James Carter finally saw his plan realized. His efforts had met with success.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Burke A. Hinsdale, Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States (New York, 1898), p. 2.

[2] Abstract of the Laws of Massachusetts, on the Subject of Public Instruction (Boston, 186-), p. 321.

[3] George Ticknor, "A Review of the Letters to the Honorable William Prescott, L.L.D., on the Free Schools of New England," North American Review, XIX (October, 1824), 455; and Lawrence A. Cremin, The American Common School: An Historic Conception (New York, 1951), p. 92.

[4] Edward I. F. Williams, Horace Mann: Educational Statesman (New York, 1937), p. 84.

[5] "Common Schools," New England Magazine, III (1832), 200.

[6] George H. Martin, The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System (New York, 1915), p. 92.

[7] Hinsdale, p. 53.

[8] Boston, 1824, pp. 55-56.

[9] Carter, Letters, pp. 56-58.

[10] Carter, Letters, p. 58.

[11]"Address by Governor George Briggs, West Newton, December, 1847," Common School Journal, X (January 15, 1848), 26-27.

[12]James G. Carter, Essays upon Popular Education containing . . . an Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers (Boston, 1826), p. iv.

[13]Carter, "Faults of the Free Schools," Essays (Boston, 1826), p. 36.

[14]Boston, 1826, p. 45.

[15]Levi Lincoln, "Summary for the Education of Instructors of Youth," United States Literary Gazette, IV (June, 1826), 234.

[16]Carter, "Outline of an Institute for the Education of Teachers," Essays (Boston, 1826), p. 53.

[17]Carter, "Outline," p. 54.

[18]Carter, "Outline," p. 48.

[19]"James Carter," Barnard's American Journal of Education, XIV (September, 1858), 415.

[20]"James Carter," 416.

[21]*Memorial of the Directors of the American Institute of Instruction*, House of Representatives, Document No. 12 (Boston, 1837), p. 3.

[22]*Memorial*, p. 11.

[23]James G. Carter, *Speech of Mr. Carter of Lancaster delivered in House of Representatives February 2, 1837* (Boston, 1837), p. 24.

[24]Carter, *Speech*, p. 19.

[25]*The General Statutes of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts relating to the Public Schools with the Alterations and Amendments to 1868* (Boston, 1868), pp. 4-6.

[26]Hinsdale, p. 107.

[27]*First Annual Report of the Board of Education together with the First Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, Senate No. 26 (Boston, 1838), p. 10.

[28]"Normal Schools," *The Common School Journal*, I (February 1, 1839), 34-35.